

More dentists coming as government boosts number who can practise

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Boost for patients as the government bolsters the dental workforce by thousands.

- Thousands more dentists will be available to see patients as government helps clear backlog of those waiting to take professional registration exams
- First sustained expansion of dental school places in nearly two decades will also allow 50 more dentists to be trained every year from 2027
- Training places to be targeted in so-called dental deserts where patients often have to fight through their teeth to get an appointment

Thousands more dentists will be available to see patients, opening up appointments across the country by boosting places on two professional registration exams.

As it stands thousands of fully qualified dentists from overseas who are often already living in the UK are unable to practise because of limited exam capacity.

In a huge boost for the dental workforce, a total of 2,400 more overseas-trained dentists, many of whom are already living in this country and waiting for the opportunity to help, could be registered annually from 2028/29.

Thanks to new government investment, final exam places run by the Royal College of Surgeons of England will be increasing nearly ten-fold, allowing up to 1,350 overseas-trained dentists to join the General Dental Council (GDCs) register annually by 2028 and be available to provide dental services - including NHS treatments - in the UK.

At the same time, the General Dental Council will significantly expand the number of places of its Overseas Registration Exam (ORE), meaning more than 1,000 overseas-trained dentists are expected to join the register annually via this route by 2028/29.

It comes alongside an increase of training places for home grown dentists, prioritising so called dental deserts which do not currently train dentists.

Health Minister, Stephen Kinnock said:

No-one in the 21st century should be left in a situation where they cannot access a dentist.

That is why today's announcement is crucial, as training more dentists and allowing greater numbers of those qualified overseas to practise, will put more patients in dental chairs, receiving care when they need it most.

These investments show this government is serious about rebuilding NHS dentistry and laying the foundations to make it fit for the future.

Backed by a one-off £420,000 grant the Licence in Dental Surgery (LDS) exam, an exam that

overseas-trained dentists can take in order to practise in the UK, is being massively expanded, with places on the final part of the exam being increased tenfold from 180 to 1,800 by 2028.

While the General Dental Council's clinical part of its Overseas Registration Exam will increase to 1,500 places which is expected to deliver more than 1,000 more dentists on the register by 2028/29.

Dr Charlotte Eckhardt, Dean of the Faculty of Dental Surgery (FDS) at the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS England), said:

RCS England is pleased to work with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to increase the number of places for candidates sitting the Licence in Dental Surgery (LDS) examination. This expansion will support more candidates, strengthen the dental workforce, and help improve public access to dentistry.

Tom Whiting, Chief Executive and Registrar at the GDC said:

Our top priority has been to increase the capacity of the ORE, and I'm pleased that we can offer greater certainty and scale through this new contract. This is good news for candidates.

More ORE places, along with more students at dental schools and the increase in capacity for the LDS, is great news for the dental workforce and, in turn, patients and the public.

Sustainable change requires a long-term plan, and working with others, we are committed to playing our part, to support any workforce strategy, including building a comprehensive framework to support international recruitment.

And in a first for nearly twenty years, an extra 50 dentists will be trained in England every year from 2027, with the Office for Students (OfS) having been asked to prioritise these new training places in so-called dental deserts which do not currently train dentists, for example in rural and coastal areas, where getting an appointment has long felt like mission impossible.

Dr Katie Petty-Saphon, Chief Executive of the Dental Schools Council:

We are pleased that the government has recognised the urgent need to grow the dental workforce at a time when access to NHS oral healthcare remains a significant challenge for many patients.

Each year, dental schools are forced to turn away talented applicants who show great potential and this increase will allow more future NHS dentists to be admitted.

Dental schools look forward to working with the government to support this expansion, ensuring recruitment follows best practice in widening participation while training NHS-ready dentists and addressing geographical gaps in access to care.

This action is just the beginning, as the government strives to fundamentally reform the dental contract by the end of this Parliament, with a focus on ensuring funding goes where it is needed

most, helping more people to get appointments and properly rewarding dentists and their teams for the vital work they do.

For too long, patients have often had to make the agonising choice between going without dental care, or paying through their nose for private treatment.

Today's announcement demonstrates the governments unwavering commitment to solving this issue and is part of the governments' wider strategy to shift the focus from sickness to prevention, as part of the 10 Year Health Plan.

Neil Carmichael, Executive Chair, Association of Dental Groups (ADG) said:

This is excellent news that ultimately will benefit patients, as well as put energy into the dentistry profession. We should soon see an increase of overseas-trained dentists, who are now able to take the robust examinations, joining the GDC's register - and providing NHS treatments.

The ADG has been pushing for some time for the bottleneck in the registration examination for international dentists to be addressed, having highlighted the craziness of having over 5,000 trained dentists from overseas waiting in the queue to qualify - whilst we have 2,700 dentist vacancies and not enough home-grown dentists to fill the gap. This is a creative approach to get things moving and we applaud the department of health's efforts and agility.

Increasing UK dental school places is also fantastic news. A career in dentistry is an exciting and rewarding one that UK students should be encouraged to pursue. As always, the ADG stands by to advise policymakers and stakeholders to keep the momentum going and ensure that we target the most urgent patient needs in dental deserts.

Eni Muco, an overseas-qualified dentist from Albania living in the UK and waiting to sit the Overseas Registration Exam (ORE) said:

I qualified as a dentist in Albania in 2013 and ran my own practice before moving to the UK in 2021 to build a life with my husband.

I joined the ORE candidate list in 2023 but, after seven failed attempts to book Part 1, I still can't sit the exam. The uncertainty has caused financial strain, anxiety and difficult family decisions.

Expanding exam capacity, fairer allocation and provisional registration would let dentists like me contribute and support the NHS.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/more-dentists-coming-as-government-boosts-number-who-can-practise>